



Martin Dew grabs a front-row seat to audition Klipsch's latest Reference Premiere loudspeakers

Atmos array packs a punch

Announce your intention to build a home cinema in the US and you could be met with a universal chorus of 'buy Klipsch!'. The brand is a household name across the Pond, where its varied range of loudspeakers (both passive and active), plus subwoofers, often appears tailored to suit large North American living spaces. Think Klipsch, think big.

Its upgraded Reference Premiere line, which represents Klipsch's top-of-the-range loudspeakers in its 'Home Theater' category, doesn't dispel that notion. Leading the charge in the 5.1.2 array reviewed here is its RP-8000F II, a hefty floorstander measuring nearly 1.1m high, and catching the eye with its pair of bronze-coloured drivers and horn-loaded tweeter. It's certainly not a speaker that will disappear into any space, suited only to a big living room or dedicated AV den.

The system reviewed here is not sold as a set and therefore doesn't have a package price, so the total (£5,195) is from the individual tickets for the RP-8000F II (£1,699 per pair), RP504C II centre (£649), RP502S II surrounds (£899 per pair), RP-500SA II (£649 per pair) and RP-1400SW subwoofer (£1,299). Note, however, that also in the range is the RP-806FA II floorstander (£2,999 per pair), a model with Dolby Atmos modules built in should you want a slightly slicker-looking setup and don't mind paying the premium.

The Reference Premiere line has been around since 2014. Enhancements to this new collection, identified by the 'II' suffix but also called the 'New Reference Premiere' in some of Klipsch's literature, include larger and improved 90° x 90° Tractrix horns, updated woofers, additional cabinet bracing and refined aesthetic designs.

Talking Tractrix

Those Tractrix assemblies, found on all the speakers including the Atmos upfiring, are, of course, a Klipsch speciality, and mount a 1in titanium tweeter in the 'throat' of their recessed horn. The promise is of a

more focused high-frequency wave dispersion to the listening area.

Below the horn assembly on the RP-8000F IIs are two 8in 'cerametallic' bass/mid cones. These floorstanders claim to dip down to 35 Hz – aided by a pair of rear-facing, rectangular Tractrix ports – so there's plenty of bass welly if you decide to put off buying a sub to another day.

Both the RP-504C II centre and dipole RP-502S II surround speakers scale down the bass/mid units to 5.25in; four in the case of the former, two in the case of the latter where they point towards the front and rear of the room when placed to the sides of the listener.

The RP-8000F IIs have claw-like steel feet which are ideal for securing onto a carpet, but shouldn't damage a hardwood floor either. Although I tested the speakers in their black veneer finish, the series is also available in walnut. The entire set is attractive, well-made and bold in stature, if perhaps lacking the 'luxury' vibe of some European brands.

The key here is that the speakers are sizeable – even the 504C II centre is deep at 38cm.

As for the RP-1400SW subwoofer, this is not part of the 'New' stable, but perfectly matches the speakers with its identical black veneer coating and bronze-hued 14in front-facing woofer. Inside, its Class D amp is rated at 500W RMS/1,000W peak. Connections and controls are par for the subwoofer course, but a wireless kit can be added if you want one less cable.

Full scale

With the system hooked up to a Primare A35.8 eight-channel power amp and, upstream of that, a Lyngdorf MP-50



AV INFO

PRODUCT: 5.1.2 floorstanding Dolby Atmos loudspeaker system

POSITION: Top models in Klipsch's catalogue

PEERS: KEF R Series; Monitor Audio Silver

1. Klipsch's cerametallic bass/mid cones give the system a unique style

2. Side view of the RP-8000F II reveals its full 46cm depth

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processor, I first ignored immersive audio sources as the massive 8000F IIs looked like they were itching to have some stereo tunes pumped into them.

The Chemical Brothers' *Got to Keep On* (CD) found the front pair and subwoofer marrying the midrange seamlessly with the bassline, which bounds relentlessly throughout the track. Both mid and bass frequencies felt conjoined, and the power and presence of the soundstage penetrated my solar plexus. There was a wholesomeness to the soundstage and fine imaging, care of those on-axis precision-focused horns.

Turning to 'Tin Pan Alley' by Stevie Ray Vaughan via Spotify, the electric guitar transients were startlingly executed as they broke through the band's low-grade hum just behind. The towers picked up on all those ragged snare and tom-tom resonances while eliciting a believable soundstage and depth of field.

Lynne Dawson's soprano voice in John Eliot Gardiner's *Mass in B Minor* (CD) felt a little piercing and, surprisingly for a horn-loaded design, on the reticent side. I would hope for a more forward vocal presentation, particularly when

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the mid-range is checking all the boxes. But the orchestra maintained a fine balance with both a large scale and decipherable layers of detail.

With movie fare, the opening salvo of *Saving Private Ryan* (4K BD) showed how capable the Klipsch system is at painting a vast canvas. The 502S surrounds created the desired effect of a convincing mural on either side of the seating area. Even the Dolby-enabled upfiring channelled discrete bullet fire across the sky. They did almost as well as ceiling-mount direct radiators. Impressive stuff. Meanwhile, the RP-1400SW sub fused brilliantly with its loudspeaker siblings.

There were times when the setup stumbled on complex, densely mixed scenes, though. The soundscape could become a little cluttered, lacking the laser-like precision exhibited with stereo music. Spinning Bond flick *Live and*

SPECIFICATIONS

RP-8000F II

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in titanium tweeter in Tractrix horn; 2 x 8in Cerametallic bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Twin rear-ported **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 35Hz-25kHz (+/- 3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLMD.):** 98dB **IMPEDANCE (CLMD.):** 8ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLMD.):** 150W (RMS) **DIMENSIONS:** 1,095(h) x 275(w) x 463(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 27.85kg

RP-504C II

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in titanium tweeter in Tractrix horn; 4 x 5.25in Cerametallic bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 50Hz-25kHz (+/- 3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLMD.):** 96dB **IMPEDANCE (CLMD.):** 8ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLMD.):** 150W (RMS) **DIMENSIONS:** 174(h) x 814(w) x 383(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 16.45kg

RP-502S II

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 1in titanium tweeter in Tractrix horn; 2 x 5.25in Cerametallic bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, dipole **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 62Hz-25kHz (+/- 3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLMD.):** 94dB **IMPEDANCE (CLMD.):** 8ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLMD.):** 100W (RMS) **DIMENSIONS:** 360(h) x 303(w) x 194(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9.6kg

RP-500SA II

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in titanium tweeter in Tractrix horn; 1 x 5.25in Cerametallic bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, angled **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** N/A **SENSITIVITY (CLMD.):** N/A **IMPEDANCE (CLMD.):** 8ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLMD.):** 75W (RMS) **DIMENSIONS:** 188(h) x 173(w) x 284(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.6kg

RP-1400SW (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 14in long-throw Cerametallic woofer **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 500W (RMS) **ENCLOSURE:** Front slot-ported **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 16Hz-141Hz (+/- 3dB) **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 542 (h) x 508(w) x 652(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 38kg **FEATURES:** LFE input; stereo line input; phase (0/180), crossover and gain control; compatible with Klipsch WA-2 wireless kit

TESTED WITH



SAVING PRIVATE RYAN: Steven Spielberg rewrote the war film rulebook with this 1998 powerhouse feature, and its portrayal of battle realism, particularly during the opening and closing set-pieces, is supported by this 4K Blu-ray's film-like visuals and breathtaking, multi-layered sound design.

Let Die (BD), Paul McCartney and Wings' rendition of the title track was massive in scale with impactful bass and compelling musicality, but on occasion dialogue from the centre speaker seemed to be battling to get through. Again, though, the sub more than lifted its weight and acted as a grown-up ballast when music and effects soared.

Face value

Where these Klipsch speakers really pay off is in the execution of a huge, fluid and wide-open soundstage, particularly with movie mixes. The musical character, meanwhile, is both smooth and engaging, and the beefy midrange is a big selling point. Remember, too, that you get a lot of smart-looking hardware for the money – Klipsch is a master at offering great value. If your budget is under £6k, these new Reference Premieres represent a great choice ■

HCC VERDICT



Klipsch Reference Premiere II 5.1.2

→ £5,195 → www.klipsch.com

WE SAY: There's a lot of bang for your buck here, but Klipsch's new top-range speakers are also impressively musical, while the Atmos toppers deliver cinematic highs.

3. All Klipsch's Reference Premiere speakers feature a Tractrix horn tweeter